

White-less Public Schools in White-ful Communities: Dejected or Segregated?

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to explore issues in resistance to the public school system in urban communities, and in particular, Chicago, Illinois. Data from the Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) *School and Citywide Reports* (CPS, 2007) were analyzed to assess the disconnect between urban communities and public education. Although the city is 42% white, white students account for a mere 8.1% of its public school enrollments. In a city where only 16.6% of families and 19.6% individuals live below poverty level, over 85% of public school students come from low-income families. The predominantly black and minority schools, which make up the majority of public schools, have fewer than 50% of their students passing standardized tests at grade level. It was recommended that initiatives to reinvent a more effective urban public school system will only work if educators become better public relations agents, and make schools "less dull" places to learn.

Introduction

The demographics of a public educational system at the national, state, or local level tell a lot about the degree to which the system can achieve its academic, social, political, and economic purposes. Notably, can a community develop solid democratic structures if its public education system is not representative of its citizenry? The response, according to Fullan (2003), should be, "no." Fullan asserts that a publicly funded system of education is the "the cornerstone of a civil, prosperous, and democratic society" (p. 3). So, why do many citizens seem not to want their children to attend the public schools?

Even the public school teachers themselves do not advocate for public education. According to Perna (2006), teachers do not know how to market their schools. But how would teachers market their schools when they would rather teach other people's children than their own? Archibald (2004) estimates that at least one in five public school teachers send their children to private schools, nationwide. In major cities, that number can be very high. The same article reported that as many as 44% of public school teachers in Philadelphia, 41% in Cincinnati, and 39% in Chicago send their children to private schools. Whatever the status that the school enjoys in the community, it appears intriguing that taxpayers' money continues being poured into a child-related enterprise to which the parents themselves and even those standing *in loco parentis* (i.e., professional educators) would rather not send their children. According to

Alexander and Alexander (2003), “teachers hold themselves out to the public as possessing superior skills and understanding of educational processes” (p. 307). Therefore, by not sending their children to public schools, the teachers’ unintended message to less sophisticated citizens could be an expert vote of non-confidence in the public school system.

The biggest question, then, is whether we can advocate for effective, universal, education, thus preparing an informed and prosperous citizenry, if the public schools are not welcomed in our communities. There does not seem to be any better illustration of this paradox than in the demographic make-up of public schools in American large cities. For instance, according to the 2000 US Census Bureau, only 9.2% of Illinois families and 10.7% of individuals live below poverty level. In the City of Chicago, slightly higher rates prevail, but they are still comparable: 16.6% of families and 19.6% individuals live below poverty level. Then, how could one explain that, according to September 2004 data, in Chicago Public Schools (CPS), 85.6% of students come from low-income families (Chicago Public Schools, 2006-2007)? In the same city, white citizens make up the largest group of the population, with 42%. The rest of the population is composed as follows: 36.8% Black or African American, 4.3% Asian, 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.1% Native Hawaiian and other Pacifica Islander, and 13.6% some other race. Of special attention is the Hispanic or Latino segment (of any race) that makes up 26% of the city’s population.

These figures hardly reflect the ethnic and racial make-up of the 420,982 students who attended Chicago Public Schools, the nation’s 3rd largest school district, during Fiscal Year 2005-2006 (Chicago Public Schools, 2006-2007). Based on the same document, during Fiscal Year 2006-2007, there were 622 public schools in the Chicago Public School system: 481 elementary schools, 114 high schools, and 27 Charter schools. African American students were the largest group, with 48.6% of the total school membership (Fiscal Year 2006-07). Latino students were the second largest group, at 37.6% of total enrollments. White students made up only a meager 8.1% of the student body.

Nationwide, with a handful of exceptions, schools in the country’s largest cities are invariably attended by the poor and the minorities (Council of Great City Schools, 2002). Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the nation’s three largest school districts: New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

Table 1
Demographics of Public Schools in New York City Department of Education, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Chicago Public Schools

		New York City	Los Angeles	Chicago Public Schools	Council of Great City Schools (66 Member Districts)
N Students	District	1,049,831	735,058	413,694*	7,274,284
	State	2,872,132	6,248,610	2,071,391	--
% Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)	District	73.3	72.8	78.0	62.4
	State	43.2	46.5	35.2	
% African American	District	34.4	12.4	47.9	37.1
	State	19.9	8.2	21.2	
% Hispanic	District	37.9	71.4	38.3*	32.8
	State	18.6	43.5	16.2	
% White	District	15.2	9.6	8.1*	23.1
	State	54.8	34.2	59.0	

Source: Council of Great City Schools. 2001-2002 Indicators Statistical Trends. Assessments.

*Chicago Public Schools. 2007 Racial Ethnic Survey.

The situation of Chicago is very telling. In 1980, when a federal decree mandated the integration of schools in the CPS district, the CPS school system was described as 17.2% white, 60.7% African American, 19.6% Latino, and 2.5% other (Garrett, 2005). Today, as Table 1 shows, the population of white students in public schools, as a percentage of total enrollments, has shrunk to a mere 8.1%. Inevitably, one cannot help but notice the mandate has not helped much. In sharp contrast, in the Archdiocese of Chicago' Catholic Schools, which, with 96,197 students, make up two thirds of all private school enrollments, a staggering 61.7% of the students are White (Archdiocese of Chicago, 2008). Only 13.1% of the students (12,630) in Catholic schools are African Americans, and 17.7% (17,034) are Hispanic. Are the public schools in the City of Chicago driving away the white population? Whereas the public school is traditionally viewed as a central, essential, institution in every modern community, it is unclear with what symbol some white and rich urban neighborhoods have substituted the public symbol.

What can the public schools do to have a membership that accurately reflects the racial and ethnic make-up of the city? Do people flee the public schools because they are disenchanted with the system, or do they hold to outdated misconceptions? Are the public schools, in their response to the current accountability movement, become too dull places to learn, as Raywid (2001) and Yelland (2006) challenge? Might an improved public relations campaign be all the city's public schools need? One must question whether the rest of the population has deserted the public schools, or consider this an ephemeral, urban, phenomenon.

This paper questions the fundamental challenge facing communities in trying to reinvent the type of schools where the children of the poor, the rich, the conservative, and the liberals could mingle and learn together about the survival and prosperity of their society. Can public schools thus abandoned by the communities' citizenry live up to their vocation of being "marketplaces of ideas?" (Alexander & Alexander, 2003, p. 45). The paper also questions the true meaning of the concept of desegregation in the context of school districts such as Chicago Public Schools, and what desegregation would bring to the public schools.

Lubienski and Lubienski (2005) found out that the conversely held belief that private schools achieve higher scores than public schools was based on outdated misconceptions. They contended that, by controlling for the socioeconomic status, public school students outperformed private school students in mathematics. If Lubienski and Lubienski's conclusions are true, even partially, then we must question why the public in today's better informed society continues taking their children out of public schools. The answer might lie in the realization that public school officials are not effective public relations agents. According to Bagin and Gallagher (2001), "educators aren't used to competing for people's attention. They have enjoyed the luxury of waiting for our publics to come to us and are therefore reluctant to take the initiative and advance ideas in the face of competing voices" (p. 1). Bagin and Gallagher further suggested that the public school's competitors—private schools—have mastered the art of capitalizing on the lack of flexibility of public schools. Private schools have learned to value the parents and students as customers, and are not as dull a place as public schools.

Bracey (2005) made the same conclusion as Lubienski and Lubienski. Bracey argued that the data that the media use have been manipulated to show a bleak picture of today's public schools" (p. 73). However, as Oh (1999) suggested, it should be the average citizens, not the sophisticated ones, who hold those tainted misconceptions. Why, then, is the middle class deserting the public schools in Chicago? The response might lie in the failure of traditional public schools to provide the type of advanced security that today's society requires. Today's security buildup in schools, in the form of technologically advanced equipment, and heavier presence of armed personnel, especially after September 11, has had the unintended effect of driving the

wealthy and middle-class citizens away from public schools. Casella (2003) sums up the dilemma facing our inner-city public schools to attract these students as follows (p. 146):

The security buildup also creates an image of schools that pronounces loudly and clearly that danger lurks in the hallways and around each corridor and, ultimately, that young people are not to be trusted... If you do not like the supersecure school with its metal detectors, patrolling police forces, and surveillance cameras, then a newer product can be offered. These products may be schools in private neighborhoods and gated communities, private schools that have greater say in who is and who is not admitted, and even some charter, magnet, or 'school choice' schools that provide further mobility, mostly for the middle class.

To investigate the seriousness of the resulting *de facto* segregation, it appeared necessary to explore the relationship between the racial and ethnic make-up of schools and their achievement in the City of Chicago. We attempted to formulate some ideas of how schools can win back the trust of parents and professional educators.

Methodology

To explore these issues, we reviewed the socio-economic fabric of elementary and high schools that were included in CPS's reports—*Elementary Schools At a Glance 2004-2005* (CPS, 2005), *High Schools at a Glance 2004-2005* (CPS, 2005), and 2007 School and Citywide Reports (2007). In the 2005 reports, CPS summarized Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores in mathematics and reading of all participating elementary schools (N = 547) and Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) scores of all participating high Schools (N = 94), by school, school type and unit, and other variables. In this paper, the achievement indicators (rates of attendance, low-income, English Language Learners, mobility, and achievement on standardized tests) were cross-tabulated by school type, and intercorrelated. Other reports by the Chicago Public Schools system, such as the 2006 Illinois State Achievement Test results, the 2007 Racial Ethnic Survey results (CPS < 2007) and the performance of CPS charter schools, were reviewed and included in the discussion. Also included in the discussion were the reports of the Council of the Great City Schools (2007)

Summary of Analyses

The racial/ethnic information was not provided for all the schools included in the reports. Of the 547 elementary schools included in the 2005 report, 527 had racial/ethnic category reported (Table 2), and of the 94 high schools reported, the information was provided for 85 (Table 3). In the reports, schools are considered integrated (IN) when they are over 30% White. They are racially mixed (RM) when 15% to 30% of the students are White. Predominantly minority (PM) schools have over 85% mixed-minority enrollments. Predominantly black (PB) schools are over 85% black, and predominantly Hispanic (PH) schools are over 85% Hispanic.

Table 2
Cross tabulation of Elementary Schools by Racial/Ethnic Category and School Type

School Type	IN	PB	PH	PM	RM	Total
General	45	223	77	79	30	454
Magnet	7	12	3	3	10	35
Charter		6	1	9		16
Year-Round		3	7	2		12
Achievement Academy		5		3		8

Military Academy				1		1
Selective Enrollment					1	1
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>249</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>527</i>

IN = Integrated; PB = Predominantly Black; PH = Predominantly Hispanic; PM = Predominantly Minority; RM = Racially Mixed

As Table 2 shows, the majority of elementary schools reported are general schools that are predominantly black (n = 223), followed by general schools that are predominantly mixed (n = 79), and general predominantly Hispanic schools (n = 77). Similarly at the high school level (Table 3), the majority of schools are general schools that are predominantly black (n = 26), followed by general predominantly mixed schools (n = 18)

Table 3
Cross tabulation of High Schools by School Type and Racial/Ethnic Category

School Type	IN	PB	PH	PM	RM	Total
General	2	26	4	18	4	54
Selective Enrollment	2	2		1	3	8
Career Academy		6		3	1	10
Charter		2		4		6
Military Academy				3		3
Magnet	1				1	2
Magnet/Career Academy				1		1
Alternative				1		1
<i>Total</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>85</i>

IN = Integrated; PB = Predominantly Black; PH = Predominantly Hispanic; PM = Predominantly Minority; RM = Racially Mixed

Relationship Between Students' Backgrounds and Academic Achievement

Composite rates for attendance, low-income, special needs, mobility, and students who meet or exceed achievement test standards were calculated, and cross tabulated by ethnic and racial make-up of schools. Sumproducts were calculated for the rates to account for differences in enrollments. In Tables 4 and 5, the following definitions were taken from the CPS reports:

- *Total Membership* is defined as the total numbers of students at each school as of September 30, 2005;
- *Attendance Rate* (% Attend) is the average percentage of students attending school each day;
- *Low Income Rate* (% Low Inc) is the percentage of students who are signed up for free or reduced lunch;
- *English Language Learners Rate* (%ELL) is the percentage of students who are found to be eligible for bilingual education;
- *Mobility Rate* (%Mob) is the number of enrollments in and transfers out of a school after October 1, divided by October 1 membership;
- *Students with Disabilities Rate* (%SWD) refers to the percentage of students in the school who have disabilities.

As Table 4 shows, students in elementary public schools in Chicago indistinctively come from low-income families. On average, the rate of low-income children ranges from 49.28% in integrated elementary schools to 94.58% in predominantly Hispanic elementary schools. Mobility rates in schools are high, rising to 30.12% in predominantly Black elementary schools. In addition to high low-income rates, as low as 35.97% of children in predominantly Black elementary schools read at grade level, with an even lower rate of children doing mathematics at grade level (35.56%). By contrast, as high as 75.75% in “integrated” elementary schools can read at grade level, and 78.65% do mathematics at grade level. Integrated elementary schools not only enjoy a much lower proportion of low-income children, but also have children who read and do mathematics at much higher rates.

Table 4
Elementary Schools’ Composite Averages in Key Outcome Indicators by Racial/Ethnic Category
(N = 498)

Racial/Ethnic Category	%Attend	%Low Inc	%ELL	%Mob	%SWD	ITBS Read	ITBS Math
IN (52)	94.56	49.28	15.01	13.71	18.10	75.75	78.65
RM (40)	95.28	72.12	21.92	14.99	14.42	65.85	70.52
PH (85)	95.48	94.58	36.22	18.97	11.41	42.63	50.55
PM (87)	94.24	89.41	20.95	23.90	14.10	43.68	49.10
PB (234)	92.01	90.70	0.36	30.12	13.35	35.97	35.56
ALL (498)	93.76	85.61	15.71	23.47	13.61	45.47	48.82

IN = Integrated; PB = Predominantly Black; PH = Predominantly Hispanic; PM = Predominantly Minority; RM = Racially Mixed

Similarly, in Table 5, with 83 high schools reporting PSAE composite rates, integrated high schools appear to have fewer low-income children than other types of schools. Integrated (IN) and racially mixed (RM) high schools are the only schools that have more than 50% of students who did the PSAE test at grade level. In Table 6, schools that had at least 50% of their children do achievement tests at a grade level were counted. Fifty-one of the 52 integrated elementary schools had children who could read and do mathematics at grade level. By contrast, only 33 of the 234 predominantly black (PB) schools (14.1%) had children who could read at grade level, and only 37 predominantly Black elementary schools had children who could do mathematics (15.8%) at grade level. Racially mixed elementary schools had the second best rates both in reading (34 out of the 40 RM elementary schools reporting) and in mathematics (38 out of the 40 RM elementary schools reporting).

Table 5
High Schools’ Composite Rates in Key Outcome Indicators by Racial/Ethnic Category (N = 83)

Racial/Ethnic Category	%Attend	%Low Inc	%ELL	%Mob	%SWD	PSAE Meet/Exceed
RM (9)	91.13	64.98	5.80	9.79	10.87	59.68
IN (5)	89.22	54.50	7.74	12.76	16.17	57.61
PM (31)	86.68	87.30	8.43	29.12	16.51	23.60
PH (3)	86.42	92.68	14.62	30.66	15.69	18.01
PB (35)	83.82	84.57	0.11	26.73	18.94	17.40
ALL (83)	86.59	81.07	5.67	24.36	16.36	29.10

IN = Integrated; PB = Predominantly Black; PH = Predominantly Hispanic; PM = Predominantly Minority; RM = Racially Mixed

Table 6
Number of Schools that Have 50% of Students who Meet or Exceed Standards, by
Racial/Ethnic Category

Racial/Ethnic Category	Elementary Schools			High Schools	
	Total	At/Exceed Read	At/Exceed Math	Total	At/Exceed PSAE
IN	52	51(98%)	51(98%)	5	3(60%)
RM	40	34 (85%)	38(95%)	9	4(44%)
PM	87	28(32%)	40(46%)	31	1(3%)
PB	234	33(14%)	37(16%)	35	1(3%)
PH	85	12(14%)	36(42%)	3	0(0%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>498</i>	<i>158(32%)</i>	<i>202(41%)</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>9(11%)</i>

IN = Integrated; PB = Predominantly Black; PH = Predominantly Hispanic; PM = Predominantly Minority; RM = Racially Mixed

In high schools, three of the five integrated high schools had at least 50% of their students pass the PSAE test at grade level. By contrast, none of the three predominantly Hispanic high schools had more than 50% of their students passing the PSAE test at grade level. Only one out of the 35 predominantly black high schools had more than 50% of students do the PSAE test at grade level, and only one out of the 31 predominantly mixed high schools had such students. *To What Extent Is the Socio-Economic Background Related to Student Achievements?*

Finally, all achievement indicators were intercorrelated. At the elementary school level (Table 7), a strong correlation was found between income backgrounds of students and school achievement. It was found that the higher the rates of children who are signed up for free or reduced lunch (i.e., low-income), the lower the rates of children who can read ($r = -0.78$) and do mathematics ($r = -0.69$) at grade level. Mobility of students is also inversely related to passing rates in mathematics and reading ($r = 0.52$).

Table 7
Elementary Schools: Intercorrelations among Attendance Rates, Low-Income Rates,
Mobility Rates, Percentages of English Language Learners, Percentages of Students with
Disabilities, and ITBS Rates (N = 498)

	%Attend	%Low Inc	%ELL	%Mob	%SWD	ITBS Read	ITBS Math
%Attend	1.00						
%Low Inc	-0.33	1.00					
%ELL	0.46*	0.14	1.00				
%Mob	-0.48*	0.43	-0.12	1.00			
%SWD	-0.16	-0.21	-0.05	-0.01	1.00		
ITBS Read	0.52*	-0.78*	0.11	-0.52*	0.17	1.00	
ITBS Math	0.57*	-0.69*	0.24	-0.52*	0.16	0.94*	1.00

* $p < .001$

Similarly at the high school level (Table 8), low-income is inversely correlated to PSAE pass rates ($r = 0.84$). Surprisingly, there seems to be no relationship between ELL rates and other socio-economic backgrounds, or with PSAE rates.

Table 8

High Schools: Intercorrelations among Attendance, Low-Income, Mobility, English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, and PSAT Rates (N = 83)

	%Attend	%Low Inc	%ELL	%Mob	%SWD	PSAT
%Attend	1.00					
%Low Inc	-0.47*	1.00				
%ELL	0.00	0.21	1.00			
%Mob	-0.61*	0.42*	0.06	1.00		
%SWD	-0.81*	0.46*	-0.01	0.53*	1.00	
PSAT	0.66*	-0.84*	-0.04	-0.48*	-0.63*	1.00

* $p < .001$

Concluding Thoughts

A more in-depth review of the data published by the Chicago Public School system is necessary to explore the relationship between school membership and academic achievement. Such a study could be conducted to explore further the true meaning of school affiliation in the Chicago Public Schools content, as well as low-income classification. A more in-depth, comparable, study of the same socioeconomic backgrounds in private schools would help examine similar relationships between achievement of students and the schools they chose to attend. For instance, Stander (2006) indicated that 97% of students in Catholic Schools graduated from high school, as opposed to only 51% for Chicago Public Schools, but did not break down the numbers by ethnicity. The Archdiocese of Chicago (2008) also made a strong claim that Catholic school students outperformed their state and national counterparts in public schools on standardized tests, but more research is needed to examine all the socioeconomic factors related to such a performance.

Nonetheless, several conclusions can be tentatively drawn. First, Chicago Public Schools, like other big city public school systems, hardly reflect the socioeconomic make-up of the city and the state. The schools look dejected and still segregated. They are overwhelmingly educating poor, non-white children. Poverty of children is then inversely correlated to achievement performance in reading, mathematics and the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAT). Second, the public schools are adversely affected by a high mobility of students, which, in turn, is related to low achievement of educational objectives. But, what does this finding mean? The fact is sad, and reflects failure on the part of the politicians and school leaders to effectively engage a whole section of the population in the education of future generations of citizens. Educators must acknowledge that the current public education system has not effectively worked for inner-city Black, Hispanic and minority students. The realization does not take away anything from the Council of Great City Schools' (CGCS, 2005) report that achievement gaps between minorities and white students are narrowing. Indeed, in its report titled "Beating the Odds," a number of cities showed faster gains in math and reading than corresponding states during the 2003-2004 year. Cities that had faster gains in reading than respective states were Baltimore, Cleveland, Dallas, Indianapolis, New York City, Norfolk, Providence, Richmond, and St. Paul. In math, such cities included Anchorage, Baltimore, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Norfolk, Portland, Richmond, St. Paul, and Toledo. Of special mention are the public school districts of Houston, Texas, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, where the gap in achievement between white and minority students has shrunk tremendously, and where the 2003 passing rates for White, African American and Hispanic students was far above the 50% mark. For instance, 91.1% of African American Students and 92.8% of Hispanic students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg passed the 4th Grade North Carolina End-

of-Grade Test of Math at or above grade level. Similarly, 85.5% of African American students in 8th Grade and 83.9% of Hispanic students in 4th Grade in Houston passed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

However, the CGCS report, at least for Chicago Public Schools, fails to account for the types of discrepancies that we summarized in this report. Namely, at the high school level, data showed that only one out of 35 predominantly black (PB) high schools (2.9%) and only one out of 31 predominantly minority (PM) high schools (3%) have 50% of students passing the PSAT. At the elementary school level, only 33 (11%) and 37 (15.8%) out of 234 predominantly black schools have 50% of their student populations who could respectively read and do mathematics at grade level. Despite CGCS report, these rates are alarming, and should offer a loud testimonial that our traditional methods of teaching these populations do not work. The kind of literacy and engaging curriculum that can affect the lives of inner-city youths has not been effectively implemented. Therefore, the question is not necessarily whether the public school system can work in big cities such as Chicago, but whether a city such as Chicago can survive intellectually, socially, economically and politically, by not selling the public school to its white and wealthy citizenry.

For the past quarter of a century, it seems that efforts in the City of Chicago have been put on a rather sluggish plan to desegregate public schools (Zehr, 2003). A number of schools, although still low, have been thus integrated, and their academic performance unquestionably attests to the benefits of school integration. However, given that only 8.1% of students in Chicago Public Schools are white (Chicago Public Schools, 2006-2007), efforts might seem futile to achieve any tangible, sensible objective by spreading thin this population into the rest of the schools. A large portion of the 8.1% attends 10 schools with 70% or more white students (CPS, Student Information System, 2004). With these statistics, it could be argued that even if all the white children attending CPS were to be bussed to non-white schools, there would be no visible impact. The real problem seems to lie in attracting middle-class students of all races and ethnic backgrounds to public school. Are the public schools doing enough?

Since the 1980 decree mandating that the Chicago Public Schools desegregate, many outstanding initiatives have been implemented. The most significant, and most revolutionary initiatives, were implemented when the mayor of the City of Chicago took control of the schools in 1995. In spring 2002, the city of Chicago went even further by closing three non-performing schools. That led to the announcement in 2004 of Renaissance 2010, a mayor's initiative whose goal was stated as follows,

The Fundamental goal of Renaissance 2010 is to turn around Chicago's most troubled elementary and high schools by creating 100 new schools in neighborhoods across the city over the next six years, providing new educational options to underserved communities and relieving school overcrowding in communities experiencing rapid growth. (Chicago Public Schools, Renaissance 2010, 2006)

Is this the solution for which the public schools in the city have waited? Provided that the three types of schools—charter, contract, performance—being created under the initiative can indeed outperform traditional public schools, will the public be convinced, and finally resolve to send their children to public schools? Will the children of the teachers, school board members, and other educators also come to the “transformed” public schools? Should the public school continue in this vague relationship with the parents and professional educators resembling that of a prison to a guard, or that of a hazardous chemical plant to an engineer? Looking at the dwindling numbers of white children attending the Chicago Public Schools, coupled with the unchanged poverty status of the children in the public schools, expecting an overnight miracle from the Renaissance 2010 agenda may seem unrealistic. However, it certainly lays a strong foundation.

These new schools will enjoy greater flexibility in a number of district policies (performance, contract, charter), and even regarding state laws (charter). One can expect that the

traditional advantages of non-public schools over public schools will not continue being a factor. Indeed, as Bagin and Gallagher (2001) suggested, the success of non-public schools capitalized on the lack of flexibility in public schools. How about public schools being dull places, a reason that Bagin and Gallagher also charged? Below are a few suggestions for urban public schools that, in addition to initiatives such as Chicago's Renaissance 2010, might help in dissipating the remnants of skepticism in the public.

First, the public schools must stop being dull places to learn. Public schools cannot teach to standardized tests and expect their students to enjoy school. Students are tortured with frightful long divisions and other rote-memorization drills, but cannot figure out what sale taxes in their local grocery stores are, interest rates on credit cards, interest rates on pay advance practices, or the stock exchange system. Inner-city neighborhoods are where politicians run on such slogans as increasing the minimum wage, instead of having businesses paying employees actual salaries. Students ought to understand, in their social studies and math classes, that being paid minimum wage, whether it is \$5.25 or \$7.00 an hour, will not raise the individual over poverty level. Inner-city children will not become politicians if they do not participate in debating exercises and other critical thinking exercises from early age. They will not become environmentally, politically, and socially responsible if they do not engage in school projects and extracurricular activities that connect them to real-life realities. Schools cannot expect to produce scientists, inventors, engineers, if their schools cannot afford laboratories, experimentations, and other performance projects. Additionally, schools cannot afford to cut such creative programs as art and music from their curricula and expect their students to grow to produce the type of works that will positively influence thought and production in the centuries to come.

More importantly, we cannot expect society to be competitive at the global level if our public schools cannot afford the structures to teach the type of technological skills and ingenuity that the world requires. Electronic technologies, including computer technology, have become a commodity in today's daily lives. Whether students live in homes that can afford electronic gadgets or other computer forms or not, their childhood is marked by information and computer technology than the childhoods of their teachers and curriculum planners. Because of this discrepancy, acquiring software and hardware may not be enough for schools to effectively enrich their curricula. Indeed, as Yelland (2006) cautions, "a fundamental problem associated with the use of computers in schools is that their use has been mapped onto existing curricula which were created in a non-computer-age" (p. 122). With proper investment and carefully planned professional development, information and computer technologies must be comprehensively and innovatively incorporated into all aspects of curriculum and instruction to "create opportunities for explorations that extend knowledge and expand inquiry skills" (Yelland, 2006, p. 130).

Second, the public schools ought to individually reconnect better with their alumni, with initiatives similar to National Education Association's (NEA, 2006) Great Public Schools for Every Child Special Events. Similar to NEA, public schools ought to have a publicly visible display where, on an alternating cycle, their successful alumni would be portrayed, alongside their best teachers. The displays would include those who have been successful academically (i.e., list of people with doctorates, medical degrees, law degrees, etc.), inventors, sports and show business celebrities, affluent individuals, representatives and senators, public figures (presidents of colleges/universities), and high government officials, etc.

Third, the public schools will benefit from disseminating their academic performance in a more aggressive fashion. Lubienski and Lubienski (2005) argued that the public is continually plagued by misconceptions of the academic superiority of private schools over their public counterparts. Very often, all the public knows is that African American and Hispanic children score several levels below white children. But such statistics are often misleading. They statistics often fail to show that the proportion of comparable white children in public schools affected by those standardized tests is several times lower than that of African American and Hispanic children, on one hand. On the other hand, the reports seldom acknowledge African American and

Hispanic children who might score in the highest percentiles. To dissipate that misconception, public schools might benefit from telling the public who their top scorers on standardized tests are, besides just providing information about top athletes.

Fourth, the public schools, especially the new concept ones (i.e., charter, contract, performance) must make good use of the known fact that it is individual donors, not corporations, who give the most to non-profit initiatives. It is estimated that individual donors give 84% of all private giving (Blum, 1996). Given the amount of flexibility that the schools have, why not establish more aggressive initiatives to solicit financial, service learning and other support from community members? If supporters have children in the public schools, their recognition should always state who their children are. Too often, the public schools traditionally go to sports and show business celebrities for support. Religious organizations, including churches and religious schools, politicians, and other non-profit organizations tend to do a better job of recognizing, in their newsletters, individuals who donate, independently of celebrity status.

Fifth, the public schools must do a better job of making teachers, school board members and other administrators their public relations agents. Indeed, government in cities such as Chicago, including teaching and public security employees, has succeeded in making their employees also live in the city. What the public schools have not succeeded in doing is connecting employment in the city schools with the outcome of such work. It seems that communities ought to dedicate themselves to solving democratic problems a priority in selecting teachers, local school council members, board members, and administrators in heavily segregated districts. Communities ought to ask applicants for such positions and roles questions related to a) having children in public schools, and perceptions about having children in public schools, b) initiatives for parents and administrators with children in public schools, c) initiatives for winning the confidence of parents and educators who have lingering, negative perceptions against public schools, and c) the role of society in increasing the public's awareness about the benefits of an equally implemented democratic education. Is the public school a place where they would send their own child? Of course, the employer ought to have some incentive for the transaction, in the form of living arrangements, fringe benefits, and other employment related initiatives. As a corollary, the city might benefit from encouraging those running for offices, especially offices that deal with education, to pledge to have their children in city schools. Only then would their speeches and other education-propaganda make sense to the public, and allay skepticism about the public schools.

Finally, it appears necessary to implement more incentives for parents and educators who have braved the misconceptions about public schools. An all-out campaign should be organized to show the democratic benefits of publicly-supported schools. The campaign's primary aim would be to guard society against the potentially damaging effect of the differential approach in teaching democratic values to our youth, whereas the schools for the poor—the public schools—are legally obligated to teach such values while the privileged, private, schools have the flexibility not to teach them. As noble as democratic values may be, the differential approach may enhance an unvoiced sense of value-imposition on the part of public schools, thus causing the students to disassociate and disengage from democratic institutions, on one hand. Similarly, the fear is founded that the privileged youth, attending non-public schools, will view democratic institutions as structures created to keep the poor and minorities in control, and, therefore, whose obligations they ought to be excluded.

In any case, creating a democratically aware and economically-productive citizenry out of public schools is a challenge on several fronts. First, people planning to teach in heavily segregated, poor, public schools ought to be appropriately trained to teach at-risk, urban, children. Second, teachers with that type of endorsement on their traditional certification ought to be compensated accordingly. Third, school leaders must reconnect with the basics in school community relations. We teach out of passion and genuine love for a prosperous democratic society, not out of lack of better options. Such considerations would help communities ensure that

their *in-loco parentis* are indeed effective advocates for democracy, and that “separate” democratic education cannot lead to an “equal,” responsible society. With the suggestions above, added to the flexibility that initiatives such as Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 allow, one can envision more attractive and more trustworthy public schools in the next few decades.

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